

THE REAL COVER-UP

IN WASHINGTON, IN THE EARLY afternoon of Nov. 22, 1963, the phones went dead. Cars swerved, ignored red lights, honked angrily. In a taxicab, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan anxiously watched people "leaving the city as fast as they could. There was the sense," he later recalled, "that something awful had happened, and something more awful might happen." Moynihan reached for his billfold, which contained a map of roads leading to the cave in West Virginia where subcabinet

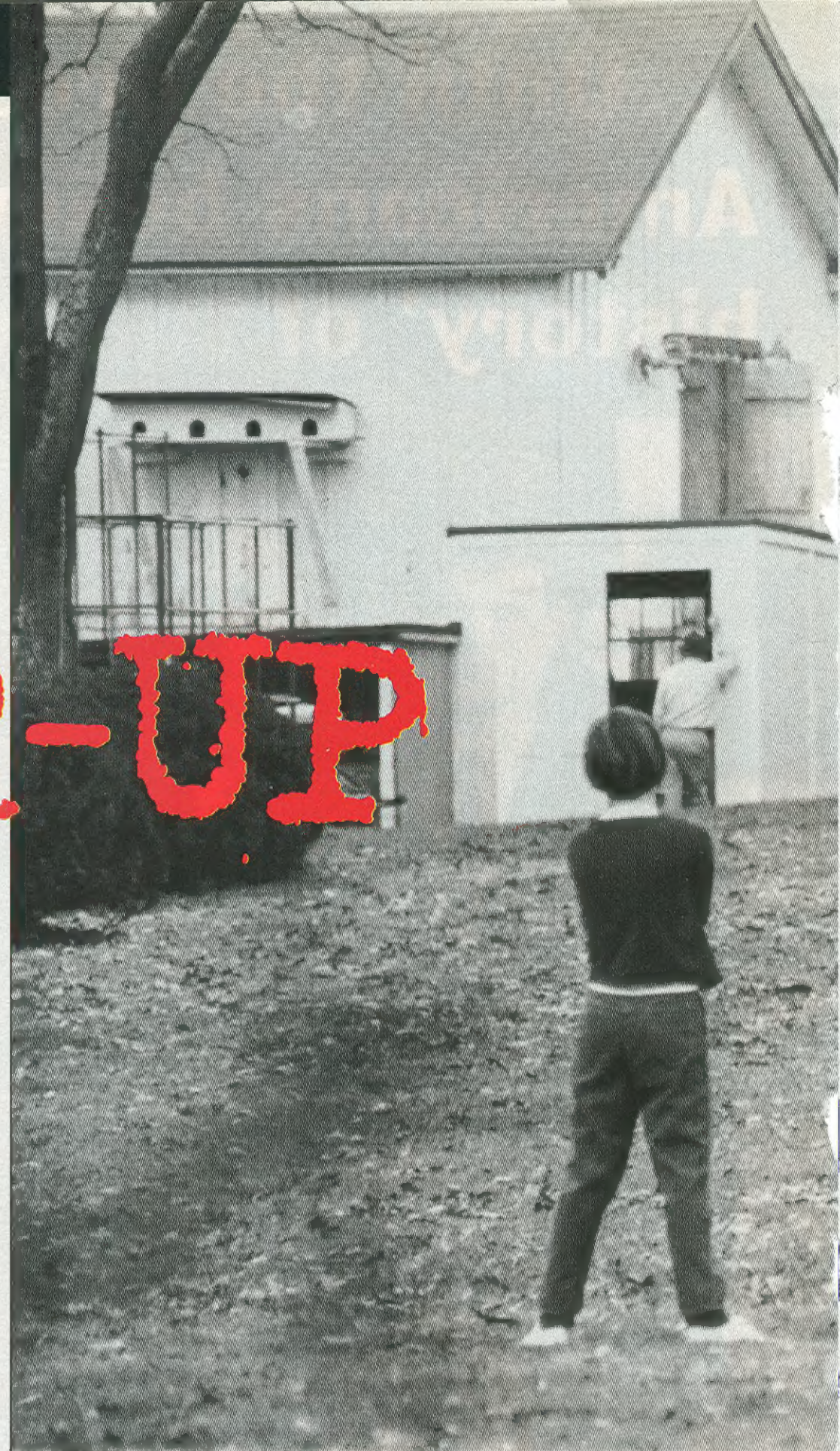
officials were supposed to meet in the event of a nuclear attack. He put away the billfold. The traffic was so snarled he couldn't get there.

At 35,000 feet over the Pacific, senior officials in the Kennedy administration wept. A half dozen of them, most of the top officials on the president's cabinet, were on their way to a meeting in Japan. Trapped in an airplane half an ocean away from the mainland United States, several feared that the president's death was the opening blow of a plot. Summoned to the front of the plane, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon assumed that a thermonuclear device had exploded over an American city. Over the plane's public-address system, Secretary of State Dean Rusk prayed, "May God help our country."

At CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., "we all went to battle stations," recalls Richard Helms, who was then the chief of the Agency's covert operations—effectively, the number-two man in the CIA. "It worried the hell out of everybody. Was this a plot? Who was pulling the strings? And what was to come next?"

In our nostalgia for that more optimistic time, it is hard to appreciate how fearful people were in November 1963.

BY EVAN THOMAS



Relations between the free world and the communist bloc were still icy. After the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, Kennedy and Khrushchev had taken some tentative steps toward détente, but still viewed each other with deep suspicion. Some Americans owned fallout shelters, and many remembered Khrushchev sputtering, "We will bury you!" On the far right, anti-communist paranoia was so great that Washington authorities actually feared a right-wing coup. In 1962, when President Kennedy read the best-selling novel "Seven Days in May," about a military putsch against the president, he remarked that it could happen to him.

In the hours and days following the assassination, America's leaders feared that a hysterical public would demand revenge for the death of their president. At the very least, they worried, the small steps Kennedy had taken toward détente would be dashed. With remarkable speed and unanimity, officials at the top levels of the U.S. government decided they must convince the country that the president's death was the work of a lone madman, not of some

vast communist plot. In the context of the time, this strategy was well intentioned, certainly understandable. But



ROBERT KENNEDY: Comforted by two of his children, he wondered about the mob

as a method of discovering the truth, it was deeply flawed.

To learn what went wrong in the days following the assassination, a team of reporters from NEWSWEEK, The Washington Post and CBS examined thousands of pages of secret cables, private memorandums and recorded phone conversations that have been released by the National Archives. The overall impression that emerges from these records, as well as from interviews with many of the participants, is that the U.S. government did not try very hard to unearth the truth about the assassination of JFK.

For years, many students of the Kennedy assassination have suspected a massive cover-up—a calculated attempt to conceal a conspiracy to kill the president. There was in fact a cover-up—indeed, there were several cover-ups. But the reality looks quite different from the conspiratorial version that millions of Americans saw in the movie "JFK." In the aftermath of the assassination, top officials were more concerned with safeguarding their own agendas than they were with disclosing all the facts relevant to the

investigation. The result was a government at odds with itself, almost comically scurrying to disguise its own nefarious plots, bureaucratic miscues and personal vendettas—all the while trying to convey a brisk sense of control to the public.

The attitude toward secrecy, both in and out of government, was different 30 years ago. At the CIA, this was the age of "plausible deniability." Bold spooks, operating with almost limitless funds, were left to do as they pleased—as long as their bosses were free to deny it. If there were dark secrets to be kept or dirty deeds to be done, most lawmakers did not want to know about them. Congressional oversight of the CIA was essentially nonexistent in 1963, and many reporters of that era were more willing to spy for the Agency than expose its secrets. By the same token, most people preferred to see their leaders as they wished to be seen. Spies were still romantic figures, not dirty tricksters; the model was James Bond, not E. Howard Hunt.

The top men at the FBI and the CIA had plenty to hide in November 1963. This was a time, we now know, when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover routinely violated the rights of citizens with illegal break-ins and buggings, while the CIA—pressured by

the president's brother Robert F. Kennedy—was earnestly, if unsuccessfully, engaged in operations like trying to make Fidel Castro's beard fall out, not to mention killing him with the assistance of the Mafia.

None of these plots had anything to do with trying to kill JFK. As a new book by Gerald Posner, "Case Closed," argues persuasively, Kennedy was almost certainly killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone. But there are some eerie coincidences that remain hard to explain, in large part because they were hastily suppressed at the time. The story of how Washington handled the death of John F. Kennedy begins with one of the strangest.

On that Friday in November, Desmond Fitzgerald of the Central Intelligence Agency was giving a lunch for a "senior foreign diplomat" at the City Tavern Club in Georgetown. Fitzgerald had just finished toasting the diplomat, whose name remains secret (he was on the Agency's payroll), when he was told he had a phone call. Normally rosy after his noon martini, Fitzgerald returned "white as a ghost," according to his executive assistant, Sam Halpern. "The president has been shot," Fitzgerald said.

"I hope this has nothing to do with the Cubans," said Halpern as the two men rushed out the door. Fitzgerald did not reply,

and on the 15-minute ride back to CIA headquarters in Langley, he silently stared straight ahead. Fitzgerald was the chief of a secret cell within the CIA called the Special Affairs Staff. His mission, as directed by Robert F. Kennedy, was to "get rid of" Fidel Castro. Fitzgerald knew that at the same moment an assassin had struck down the president in Dallas, one of Fitzgerald's own agents, at a safe house in Paris, was handing a poison pen to a would-be assassin of Fidel Castro.

It was, at the very least, grim happenstance. The CIA had been trying to kill Castro for the past four years, and recently Castro had threatened to retaliate. "We are prepared," he declared in September, "to answer in kind. United States leaders should think that if they are aiding in terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

This article was researched from the National Archives by Walter Pincus and Anne Eisele of The Washington Post and Anne Underwood of NEWSWEEK, with additional reporting by the staff of CBS Reports (which will air "Who Killed JFK? The Final Chapter" on Nov. 19 at 9 p.m. EST) and NEWSWEEK's Evan Thomas, Melinda Liu and Adam Wolfberg in Washington and Yevgenia Albits in Moscow.



CASTRO: The Cuban leader threatened to retaliate against U.S. plots

Fitzgerald had ignored Castro's warning. He was under enormous pressure from Bobby Kennedy to "do something." The CIA had even hired the Mafia, but a half-dozen plots had fizzled. Fitzgerald himself had dreamed up several abortive schemes. After learning that Castro was a scuba-diving enthusiast, he suggested poisoning Castro's wet suit or planting an exploding seashell where he might dive. ("How can you be sure Castro will pick up the right shell?" an aide had asked.) When Rolando Cubela, a Cuban military officer who had once been close to Castro, presented himself as a potential assassin early that fall, Fitzgerald had eagerly responded. On Oct. 29, he had met with Cubela, code-named AM/LASH, in Paris. Fitzgerald had introduced himself as the "personal representative" of Robert F. Kennedy.

Fitzgerald's advisers had warned him against the meeting. His chief of counterintelligence feared that Cubela was a double agent, a "dangle." But Fitzgerald had refused to listen. "It wasn't the first time Des went on a gut feeling," says Halpern. The CIA man ordered one of his top agents to deliver a poison pen to AM/LASH on Nov. 22, with the promise of a sniper's rifle to

come. Fitzgerald was so confident that he had made a \$100 bet with national-security staffer Michael Forrestal that Castro would be gone by Election Day, 1964.

Now Fitzgerald had to wonder. Had Castro struck first?

At the Seat of Government, as J. Edgar Hoover liked to call his headquarters in Washington, the Director had already decided that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin. According to his notes, at 4:01 p.m., he called Attorney General Robert Kennedy and "told him I thought we had the man who killed the president down in Dallas at the present time."

Although he had been in power for four decades, Hoover was worried about his job. He had heard, from reliable sources, that

Kennedy was thinking of sacking him. Hoover hated the Kennedys. He deplored their glamour and their philanderings (which he knew about because the FBI bugged their phones), and was infuriated by their lack of deference to him. That afternoon, when Hoover reported the death of the president to the attorney general, "he was not quite as excited as if he were reporting the fact that he found a communist on the faculty of Howard University," Bobby Kennedy later recalled.

Hoover felt better about Lyndon Johnson, who was almost as devious as he was. But Hoover needed to prove himself. "He wanted to get credit for solving the thing, and he wanted to get it fast," said Courtney Evans, one of Hoover's assistant directors.

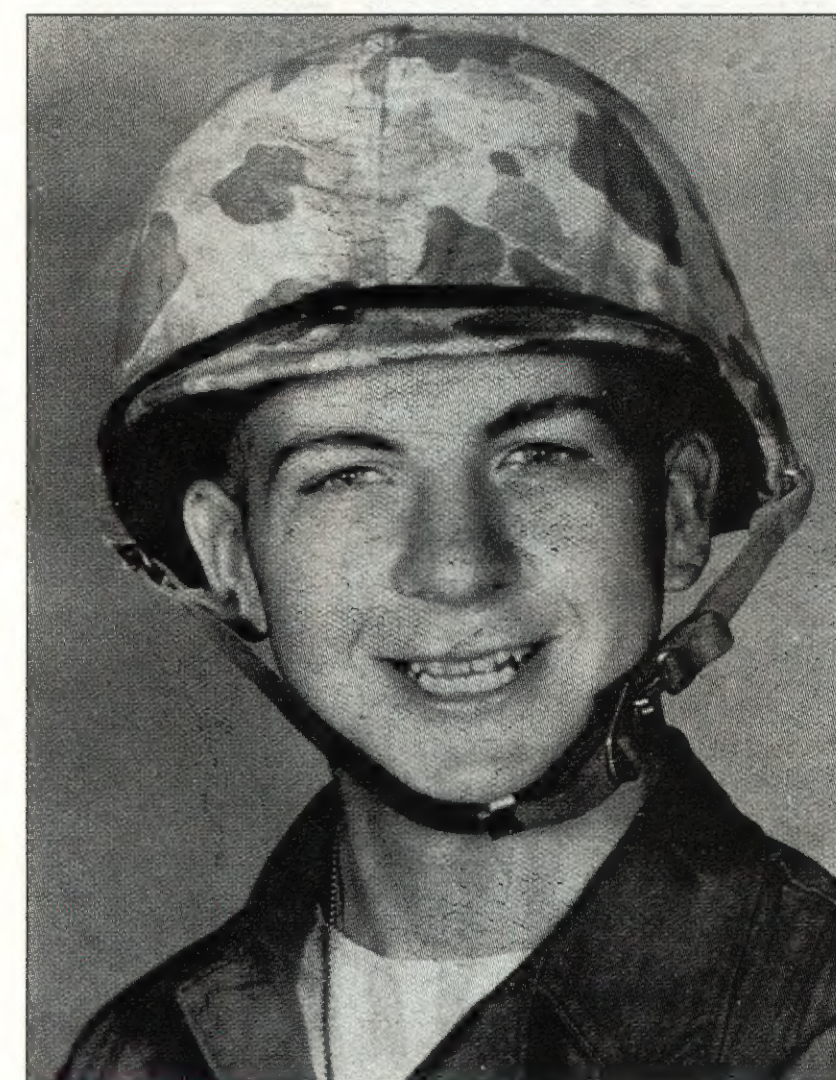
Lee Harvey Oswald

The Mind of the Assassin

BY MELINDA BECK

IN OLIVER STONE'S "JFK," Lee Harvey Oswald sits out the assassination in the lunchroom of the Texas School Book Depository while a team of expert marksmen executes the president. Then he wanders bewildered into Dealey Plaza, where he realizes he's been set up to take the fall in a CIA/military plot. That shows how far conspiracists have gone in their zeal to find sinister masterminds behind Kennedy's murder. They have assigned a bit role to the mercurial loner who pulled the trigger in Dallas.

Today the evidence seems more compelling than ever that Oswald killed John F. Kennedy. There will always be critics, but ballistics tests and re-examinations of Abraham Zapruder's home movie cited in Gerald Posner's new book, "Case Closed," make a persuasive argument that only three bullets were fired, all from the book depository, and that the sniper had ample time to shoot. It also seems clear from Oswald's bitter 24 years that he was psychologically prone to commit a historic act of violence. He was a chronic malcontent who defected to Russia in the middle of the cold war, then came home disillusioned. He saw himself as an intellectual but couldn't hold a job, and he'd resorted to violence before. At 9 he attacked his half brother with a butcher knife; he beat his wife, and he tried to kill a right-wing fanatic, Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker, with the same mail-order rifle he trained on Kennedy seven months later. Oswald also took a



THE LONER: Seeking something to belong to, he joined the Marines in the 1950s

loaded revolver to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City in September 1963, according to a new book, "Passport to Assassination," by Oleg Nechiporenko, one of the KGB agents he spoke to there. He threatened to use the gun if the FBI didn't stop hounding him.

Oswald's alienation started early. He was born in New Orleans in 1939, two months after his father's death. His unstable mother put him and his brothers in an orphanage for a while, then moved with

Lee 13 times before he was 10. A New York psychiatrist who saw him for truancy when he was 13 found he had "a potential for explosive, aggressive, assaultive acting out [and] a vivid fantasy life, turning around . . . omnipotence and power."

Oswald seemed always to be searching for something to belong to. At 16 he wrote to the Socialist Party of America, asking to join its "youth league." A few weeks later he joined the Marines. There, he kept to himself and read about Marxism. He qualified as a sharpshooter but accidentally shot himself while stationed at an air base in Japan. In November 1959 he won an early discharge, citing his mother's poor health. But a few days later he sailed to England, then made his way to Moscow.

Soviet officials didn't know what to make of the arrogant 20-year-old who offered to tell them everything he'd learned in the Marines—they initially thought he was an American spy. "He had no contacts we were interested in, no information we didn't know already," former

KGB chief Vladimir Semichastny told NEWSWEEK in Moscow recently. When the Soviets refused him citizenship, Oswald slashed his wrists. They sent him to Minsk, gave him a job in a radio factory and a small cash stipend. But Oswald soon soured on the Soviet system, which he saw as a perversion of Marxism. He made two makeshift grenades—possibly to blackmail the Russians into letting him leave. That wasn't necessary. When Semichastny heard of his request, he said, "Thank

Hoover cared far more about appearances than he did about actually solving crime. For years, he satisfied his paranoia about communism by harassing hapless leftists, yet he virtually ignored the existence of the Mafia. Hoover wanted to stack up impressive statistics to prove that the FBI always got its man. In a sense, though, it almost didn't matter which man.

Special Agent James Hosty Jr. of the Dallas Field Office of the FBI played by the book. In Mr. Hoover's FBI, an agent had to go by the book, or he would wind up in the Butte, Mont., Field Office. Hosty had been given a file on Lee Harvey Oswald back in March. He had been told to investigate Oswald as a potential security risk or spy. But he was not allowed to confront Oswald with a startling

fact: in late September, secret CIA cameras and wiretaps had recorded Oswald entering the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City. Letting Oswald know what the CIA and FBI knew might reveal that the U.S. government was bugging an embassy in a foreign country and cause a flap.

It is not unusual for intelligence or law-enforcement agencies to care more about protecting "sources and methods" than preventing a crime. So Hosty had simply asked Oswald's wife, Marina, a few questions about her husband's whereabouts. The FBI agent wasn't even allowed to tell the Dallas police what he knew. Espionage cases were strictly need-to-know. Those were the rules, and Hosty followed them.

Lee Harvey Oswald

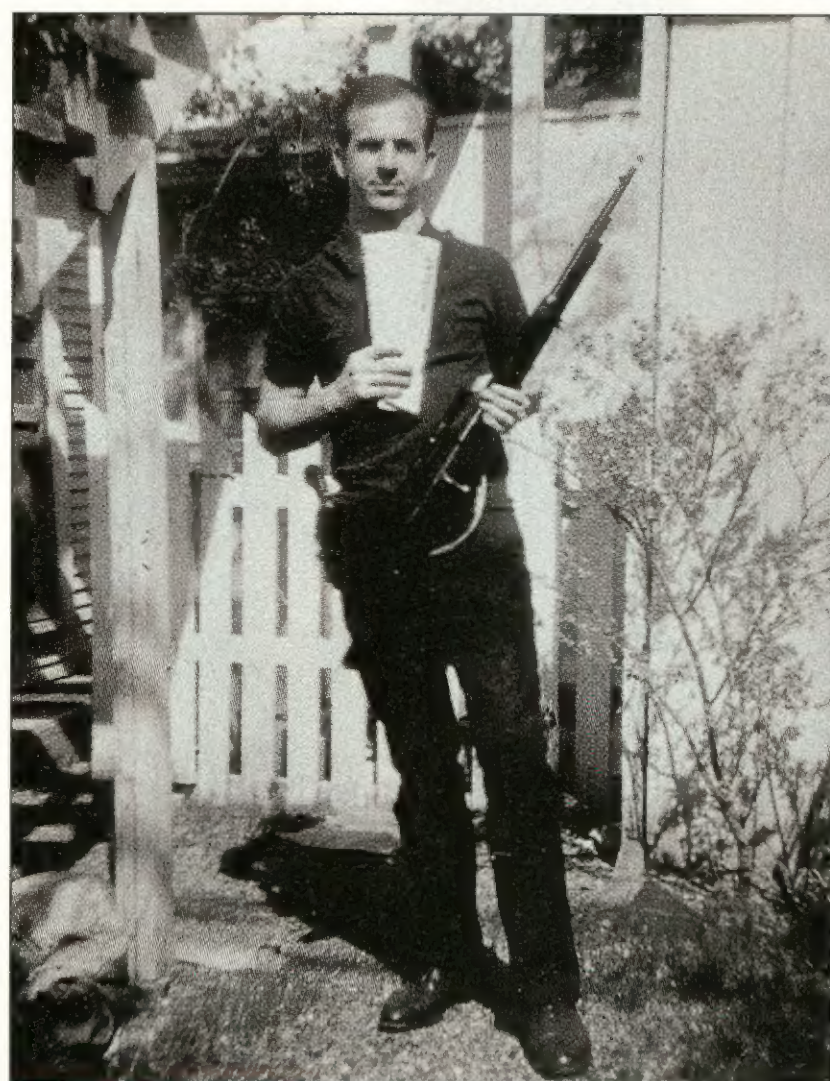
God! . . . Let him go." Meanwhile, Oswald married Marina Nikolayevna Prusakova, the niece of a Soviet colonel. As they sailed home with their infant daughter, in June 1962, Oswald boasted a "whole bunch" of reporters would meet them. There were more disappointments ahead.

Back in Texas, Oswald struggled to find work, quarreled with Marina and struck up an odd friendship with George de Mohrenschildt, an aristocratic Russian émigré. De Mohrenschildt taught him to hate right-wingers, and Oswald fixated on Walker, who'd run for governor of Texas. It wasn't known until after the Kennedy assassination that he was the assailant who fired a bullet through Walker's window in April 1963. But de Mohrenschildt joked at the time: "Lee, how is it possible that you missed?"

By then Oswald's political allegiance had shifted to a "purer" Marxist, Fidel Castro. He moved to New Orleans and set up a chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, but he was apparently the chapter's only member. Conspiracists have made much of the fact that the address he listed on handbills also housed an office for Guy Banister, an ex-FBI agent with ties to naval intelligence and mob boss Carlos Marcello. But Posner claims Oswald's office never existed; he may simply have invented it to impress FPCC leaders. His offer to work for anti-Castro Cuban exiles was an amateurish attempt to infiltrate the opposition. He later debated the anti-Castroites on the radio and was humiliated when an interviewer brought up his Russian defection. Convinced he'd been discredited, Oswald grew desperate to leave America, and even talked about hijacking a plane to Cuba.

Instead he went by bus to Mexico City, and was agitated when the Cuban embassy told him he needed a Soviet visa to enter

Havana. The undercover KGB agents he spoke to were stunned when he pulled out his revolver, saying he needed it for protection. Nechiporenko told NEWSWEEK



SHARPSHOOTER: Conspiracists think this photo is fake, but Marina said she took it

that Oswald was crying: "He kept saying his life was in danger, and that it might end badly if he didn't get to the U.S.S.R." The KGB men calmed him down but sent him away, convinced he was unstable.

Oswald returned to Dallas in October 1963, grumbling about the bureaucrats he'd met in Mexico. Marina never again heard him talk of "Uncle Fidel." With their second child due any day, he searched dejectedly for work, and got a job as a stock clerk at the book depository. On Nov. 19

and 20, newspapers printed Kennedy's motorcade route. On Nov. 21, Oswald visited Marina in nearby Irving and begged her to join him in Dallas. She refused and woke up to find \$170—all their savings—and his wedding ring on the bureau.

"UNKNOWN WHITE MALE, 30, slender build, 5 feet 10, 165 pounds": the description, flashed over the police radio after the assassination, matched the man whom Patrolman J. D. Tippit spotted at 1:15 p.m. When Tippit stopped him, Oswald shot him, then ran into a movie theater. He had that gun on him when arrested. Police later found his palm prints on the rifle left at the book depository. In custody, however, he denied shooting Tippit. He denied shooting Kennedy. He denied owning a rifle and said he'd never been to Mexico City. He was being moved to county jail when Jack Ruby burst through the crowd and shot him.

Even those who are convinced that Oswald was the sole assassin remain puzzled about his motive. Friends say he admired Kennedy, apart from his Cuban policies. Oswald may have been trying to ingratiate himself with Castro. Or the answer may lie in his troubled marriage. Priscilla Johnson McMillan wrote in her 1977 biography, "Marina and Lee," that Marina ridiculed Oswald in bed and made no secret of her attraction to JFK, who reminded her of an old boyfriend in Minsk. "Lee was like a gun cocked and ready to go off that fall," McMillan says. A motive as mundane as jealousy will never satisfy the conspiracists; last week the CIA released 1,500 more pages of documents which could yield new clues. But given Oswald's tormented psyche, even a small provocation could have been enough to send him into a murderous rage.

With MELINDA LIU in Washington and YEVGENIA ALBATS in Moscow

At the time, Hosty did not regard Oswald as a threat to the president. He was more worried about the right-wing crazies he had also been assigned to investigate. On Nov. 22, as he was sitting in a Chinese restaurant eating a cheese sandwich (it was Friday, and Hosty was a good Roman Catholic), he heard a wail of sirens. Weeping, a waitress told Hosty that President Kennedy had been shot. Hosty, stunned, immediately blamed the right. He was hardly alone. Chief Justice Earl Warren, CIA Director John McCone and Jackie Kennedy all assumed at first that the president had been targeted by a fanatic right-winger.

Rushing back to the field office, Hosty learned that shots had been fired from the Texas School Book Depository, and that Dallas police had arrested a suspect named Lee Oswald. Hosty reeled: he knew that Oswald worked in the book depository.

He was dispatched to Dallas police headquarters, where Oswald was being interrogated, and instructed to tell the Dallas police everything he knew about the suspect. He found Oswald sitting in a 10-foot-by-14-foot room, surrounded by police and Secret Servicemen. The suspect was smirking. But he banged on the desk when he heard Hosty's name. "I know you! You accosted my wife!" he yelled. He began cursing Hoover and calling the FBI "the Gestapo." Hosty asked him if he had ever been to Mexico City. Oswald angrily denied it.

At 4:05 p.m., the interrogation concluded so that Oswald could be put in a police lineup. As Hosty left the room, he was approached by a senior FBI agent. He was told to say nothing more about Oswald to the Dallas police and to return to headquarters.

On his way back, Hosty wondered at the sudden change in signals. He found Gordon Shanklin, the FBI's special-agent-in-charge for Dallas, sitting in his office. The SAC was holding up a note that he had found amid Hosty's work papers. Shanklin pointed out that Lee Harvey Oswald himself had marched into FBI headquarters just a few weeks before, and delivered an unsigned note addressed to Agent Hosty. And what had Hosty done about it? Nothing. Hosty protested that the note was "no big deal," that it simply told the FBI to stop bothering Oswald's wife. But he saw that he had broken the most important FBI rule of all: never embarrass the Director.

Deputy Attorney General Nick Katzenbach sat in his cavernous office at the Department of Justice late that Friday afternoon, talking gloomily to his aides. Katzenbach was once described by The New York Times as a "reconciler, a depo-

larizer, a common-denominator seeker . . . a cooler downer." In the days after JFK's assassination, he would serve, in effect, as the nation's top law-enforcement official. His boss, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was grieving at home. It fell to Katzenbach to fashion the federal government's response to this terrible crime.

He was not afraid that the shooting of the president was the first step in a communist attack (or that it was the work of a right-winger). "I wasn't thinking about atom bombs. I didn't think for a minute that the Soviet Union was behind this," he later recalled. **He was bothered by the appearance of Oswald's ties to the Kremlin.** What if Americans believed that Oswald was a communist agent, sent to kill the president? The hysteria could tear apart the country. It would certainly wreck the small progress that had been made by the Kennedy administration to warm East-West relations.

A hulking presence with a dry, self-deprecating wit, Nicholas deBelleville Katzenbach, of Exeter, Princeton, Oxford (Rhodes scholar) and Yale Law School, was a figure of the establishment. He was also "tough," as Kennedy lieutenants were required to be. A bomber pilot shot down in World War II, he had tried twice to escape from a POW camp. Katzenbach was sent by RFK to enforce the civil-rights laws at the University of Alabama, where he faced down Gov. George Wallace in the "schoolhouse door." But the way Katzenbach integrated the university is more revealing: he sneaked the first two students into their dorms, out of sight of the cameras. He was a subtle and shrewd bureaucrat with an instinct for the center. Keeping peace, not probing deeply, would be his focus in the weeks ahead.

Lyndon Johnson flew by helicopter from Andrews Air Force Base to the White House that evening surrounded by an establishment phalanx. National-security adviser McGeorge Bundy, Secretary of Defense Bob McNamara and Under Secretary of State George Ball all impressed on the new president the importance of a smooth transition. Foreign governments, as well as the American people, must be reassured that the work of the Leader of the Free World goes on. Whoever killed Kennedy, what mattered now was continuity. Ball even urged Johnson to occupy the Oval Office immediately.

Mac Bundy realized that would be a mistake when he found the president's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, forlornly sitting outside the Oval Office on Saturday morning. The myth would later grow that Johnson had arrived and tried to push aside

Mrs. Lincoln and the Kennedy retainers. A famous photograph showed Kennedy's rocking chair being carried, upside down, from the White House that weekend. Actually, it was coincidence; the office was being redecorated. LBJ wisely chose to stay out of the Oval Office for a few days.

AFTER 4 A.M. ON SATURDAY, Robert F. Kennedy took a last look at his brother and hardly recognized him. The morticians had made the slain presi-

dent appear plastic. "It doesn't look like him at all," Bobby Kennedy said. He ordered that the coffin, lying in state in the East Room, be kept closed for public viewing. Bobby believed that there were some things about his brother that the public should never know. He had already asked that JFK's autopsy not reveal that the president suffered from Addison's disease, a fact carefully concealed during the 1960 campaign. It was a minor medical cover-up—but it would lead later conspiracy theorists to charge that the autopsy had been rigged to conceal darker secrets. There were, in fact, a great many secrets that Bobby Kennedy was determined to keep.

An hour before dawn, RFK tried to go to bed. An old friend, Charles Spalding, handed him a sleeping pill. "God, it's so awful," Kennedy said. "Everything was really beginning to run so well." Bobby went into the Lincoln Bedroom and closed the door. Standing outside the door, Spalding heard Kennedy sob and say, "Why, God?"

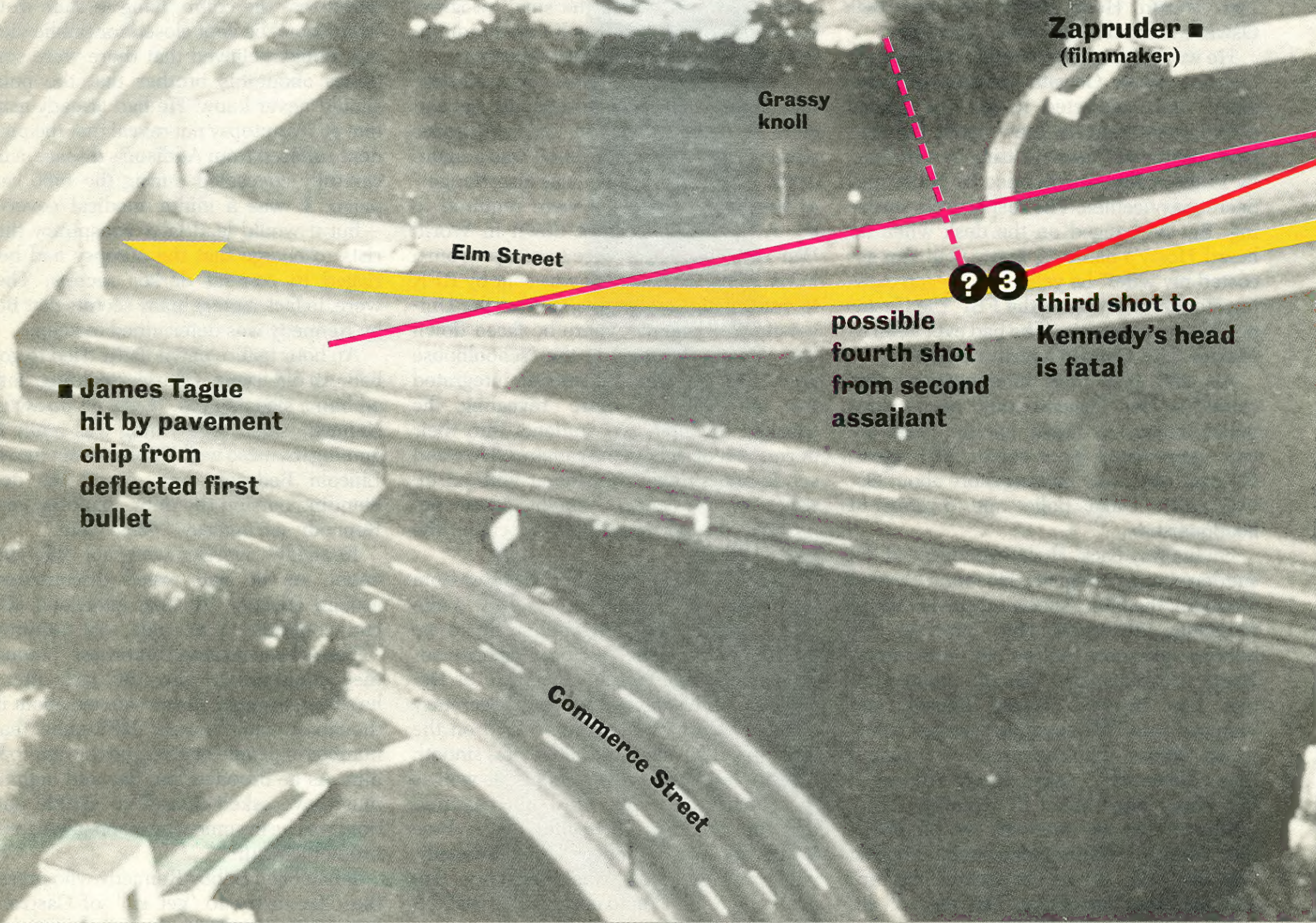
Kennedy's worries were not only existential. As he had paced disconsolately around Hickory Hill that afternoon, RFK had confided to an aide, Ed Guthman, "There's been so much bitterness. I thought they would get one of us. But Jack, after all he's been through, never worried about it. I thought it would be me." RFK knew that a number of people had reason to want to kill him. As he brooded that day and night, he must have asked himself a terrible question: was he in some way responsible for his brother's death?

It had been Bobby Kennedy who pressed the CIA to try to "get rid" of Castro. "I heard him use those words," says Richard Helms, the Agency's deputy director who, along with Des Fitzgerald, reported to RFK on Cuba. "We had a whip on our backs. If I take off my shirt, I'll show you the scars." It had also been Kennedy who, as attorney general, stepped up pressure

What Happened at Dealey Plaza?

Dallas, November 22, 1963, 12:30 p.m.

Recent analysis by Gerald Posner suggests that Oswald's first shot was earlier than the Warren Commission supposed. The deflected shot still left Oswald plenty of time—152 frames of Abraham Zapruder's home movie, or about eight seconds—to hit the president twice. Witnesses on Elm Street claim to have heard a "fourth shot" coming from atop the grassy knoll. In 1978 the House Select Committee on Assassinations found a police recording that seemed to corroborate the shot from the knoll, but the forensic experts have challenged the validity of the tape.



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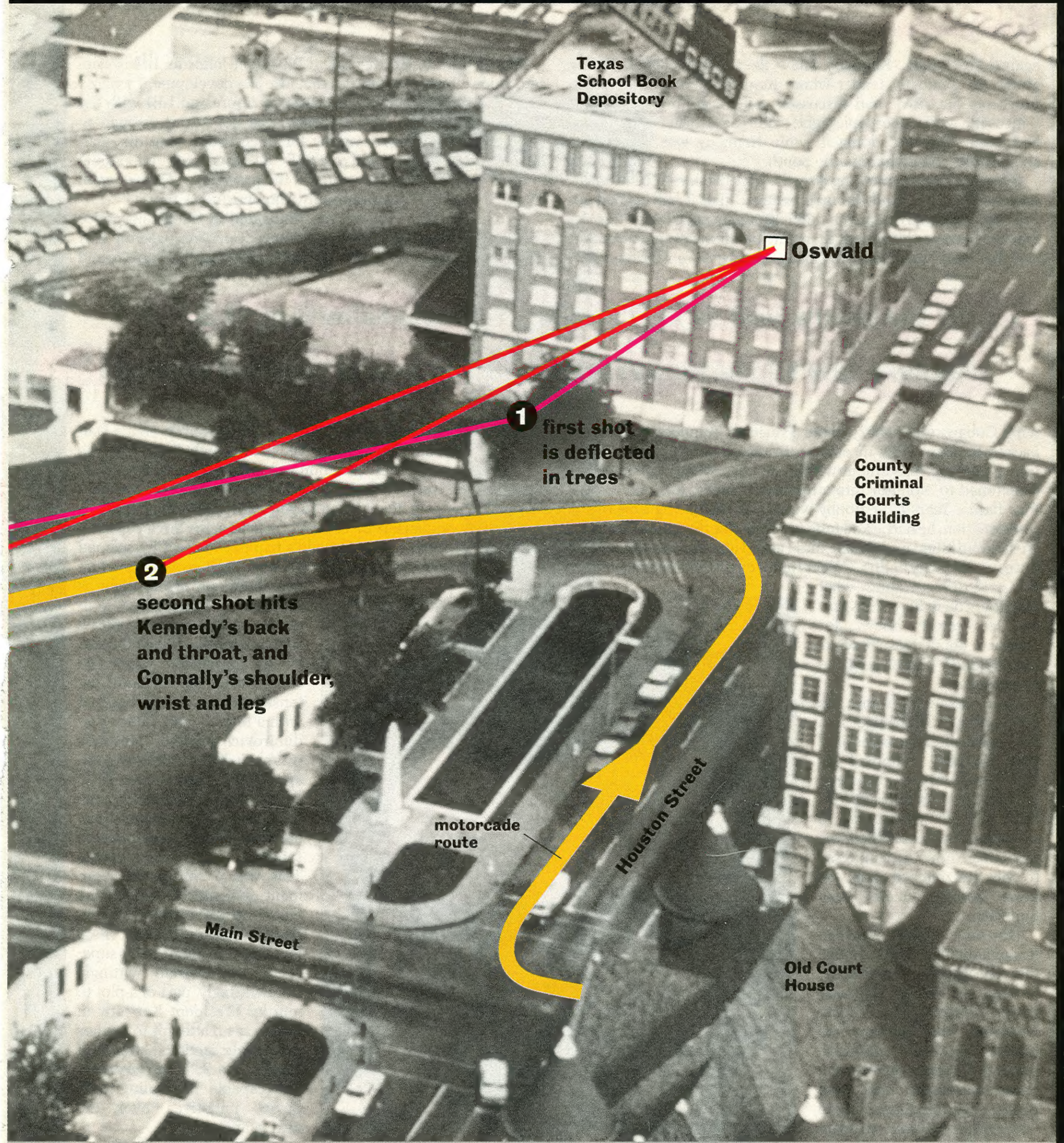
shooter's view

Zapruder frame 161

2 Shot 2
3.5 seconds later

shooter's view

Zapruder frame 225



3 Shot 3
8.4 seconds after first shot

shooter's view

Zapruder frame 313

4 Kennedy

Kennedy

DEALEY PLAZA PHOTO: TEXAS SCHOOL BOOK DEPOSITORY
RE-ENACTMENTS: NATIONAL ARCHIVES
BODY SKETCHES: WARREN COMMISSION
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against the Mafia. Kennedy knew that a year earlier, Jimmy Hoffa, the Teamster leader whom Kennedy had been trying to prosecute for years, had discussed using a gunman, equipped with a rifle with a telescopic sight, to kill the attorney general. He had even suggested doing it while Kennedy was riding in a convertible, somewhere in the South.

Kennedy knew something else: the CIA had hired the Mafia to try to kill Castro. And the mob believed that it had helped get President Kennedy elected in 1960. Kennedy understood that the mob felt betrayed by the way their patriotism was being rewarded, and that there was a lot of lingering bitterness. In Florida, right-

Shortly after 9, Hoover called President Johnson. In his staccato voice ("I just wanted you to know of a development which I think is very important"), the Director impressed LBJ with the Bureau's fast work. The evidence was not strong enough to convict yet—they were waiting for fingerprints—but they had the murder weapon. It had cost \$21. "It seems almost impossible to think that for \$21 you could kill the president," Hoover said. "Now," he added conspiratorially, "no one knows this."

Two hours later, Hoover was blindsided by the Dallas police chief, Jesse Curry. At a press conference, Curry accused the FBI of failing to keep his force "advised regarding the background

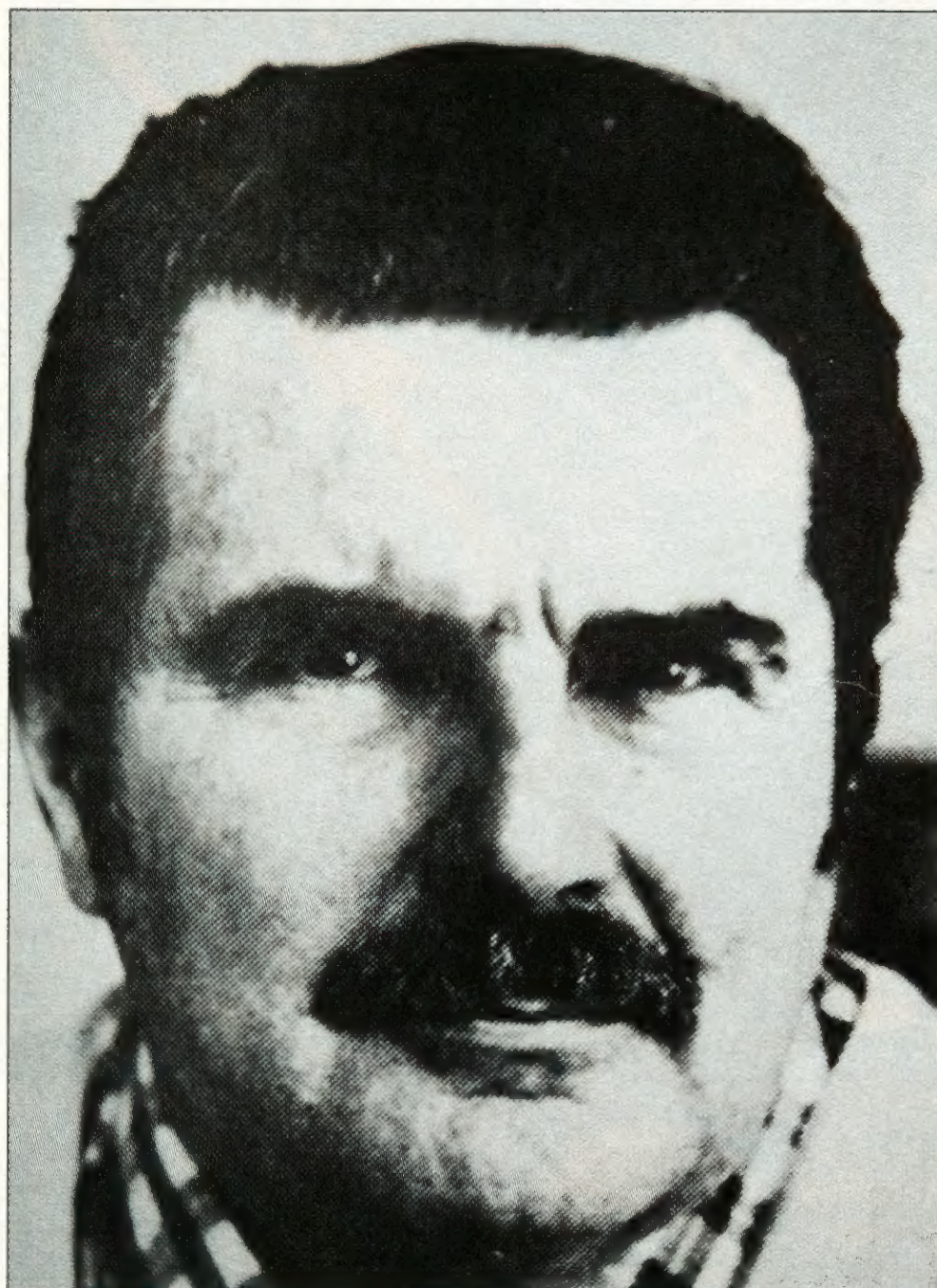
... In the hours and days following the assassination, U.S.

leaders feared that a hysterical public would demand revenge ...

wing Cubans were angry about President Kennedy's failure to back up the Bay of Pigs invasion with air and naval support. There was even deep resentment within the CIA, which Kennedy had threatened to "splinter into a thousand pieces" after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Years later Bobby would say that at the time of the assassination, he had asked John McCone, the director of the CIA, "if they had killed my brother, and I asked him in a way he couldn't lie to me, and they hadn't." What Kennedy did not realize was that McCone did not know what was going on in his own Agency. He never knew, for instance, about Des Fitzgerald, Rolando Cubela and the poison pen.

In a conversation with his friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr. a few weeks after the assassination, Kennedy mumbled his fears that his brother had been killed by the Mafia or the Cubans. But he never spoke to investigators. What difference did it make now? he would say to Nick Katzenbach. Jack was dead; nothing would bring him back.

Hoover's men worked through the first night to make the case against Oswald. By 5 a.m., as Bobby Kennedy tossed fitfully in the Lincoln Bedroom, the Bureau had tracked Oswald's purchase, under a fictitious name, of a cheap mail-order rifle from Klein's sporting-goods store in Chicago. At 6:15 a.m., an agent arrived from Dallas at Andrews Air Force Base with the rifle, spent cartridges and the blanket Oswald had used to hide his gun. They were rushed to the FBI's crime labs downtown.



HOSTY: The Dallas FBI agent destroyed Oswald's note

and whereabouts of Oswald." Furious, Hoover ordered his Dallas chief, Gordon Shanklin, to "set him straight." By 1:15, the networks were quoting retraction statements from Curry. A few minutes later, the FBI lab identified traces of nitrate on Oswald's hands. By evening, the lab had fingerprints and palm prints.

At CIA headquarters on Saturday morning, the Soviet specialists still suspected a plot. Oswald's trip to Mexico City seemed especially disturbing in the light of a startling discovery, one that

had shown up Friday night as the spooks pored over transcripts of the Agency's secret wiretaps of the Soviet Embassy. In September, when Oswald visited the embassy, ostensibly to get a visa, he had met with a man named Valery Vladimirovich Kostikov. Kostikov was not just an ordinary consular official. He was a senior KGB agent—worse, a member of the KGB's 13th Department, which handled so-called wet affairs, sabotage and assassination. This was a sinister development, thought the chief of the CIA's Soviet division, T. H. Bagley. "Putting it baldly," Bagley wrote in a memo to his superiors, "was Oswald, wittingly or unwittingly, part of a plot to murder President Kennedy in Dallas as an attempt to further exacerbate sectional strife and render the U.S. government less capable of dealing with Soviet initiatives over the next year?"

Agency station chiefs all over the world were being approached by their KGB opposites, disavowing any responsibility for the assassination. "It was almost like they were reading from a manual,"



FITZGERALD: The CIA man knew that his agent was handing a poison pen to a Cuban assassin when JFK was shot

said Walt Elder, the special assistant to CIA Director McCone. Some Agency officials wondered if the denials were a little too orchestrated.

Dick Helms was wary of jumping to conclusions. "We could have had a very nasty situation," he later recalled. "What would be the retaliation? A startled America could do some extreme things. . . . We needed to be careful."

Helms was the CIA's equivalent of Nick Katzenbach (whom he often saw on the Georgetown cocktail circuit). The deputy director was known within the Agency as a cool hand who liked to move cautiously. He had risen to the head of covert operations in part by avoiding "flaps," as the spooks called botched or blown operations. During the Bay of Pigs, Helms had been nowhere to be seen. Helms disdained "cowboys," the activists who thought that spying was all a big game. Above all, he valued secrecy.

Late Saturday afternoon, Helms was informed by the Agency's Mexico station that the Mexican government was about to arrest Silvia Duran, a Cuban Embassy official who had talked to Oswald when he visited there on Sept. 27. Through his deputy, Tom Karamessines, Helms tried to stop the arrest. It could "prejudice U.S. freedom of action on the entire question of Cuban responsibility," Karamessines cabled. Helms wasn't sure whether Cuba was responsible or not, but he knew he didn't want the Mexicans to find out first. Told it was too late, that Duran had already been arrested, Helms insisted that the Mexicans be made to keep quiet.

It has become fashionable to view the CIA of the more free-wheeling '50s and '60s as a "rogue elephant." It is more accurate to view it as a maze of many compartments. The basic divide was between the traditional spies, like Helms, who believed in carefully gathering intelligence, and the covert-action enthusiasts, like Fitzgerald, who gloried in manipulating (and occasionally

overthrowing) foreign governments. Neither side trusted the other. And so great was the tradition of secrecy that it was possible for the director of the CIA not to know what was going on in his own Agency.

Des Fitzgerald was desperately trying to guard his secrets that Saturday. He told his agent in Paris to break off contact with Rolando Cubela, the would-be assassin code-named AM/LASH, and return immediately to headquarters. Then he considered his own exposure.

Fitzgerald had not told the director of the CIA, John McCone, about AM/LASH. National-security adviser Bundy would later describe this oversight as an act of "outrageous insubordination." But in the compartmentalized CIA, where the rule is that an official never knew anything he did not "need to know," Fitzgerald could credibly say he had authority from a higher source than the director—namely, from Bobby Kennedy.

Still, President Kennedy was dead now, and Fitzgerald knew he had an embarrassing situation on his hands. That weekend, he went to McCone's assistant, Walt Elder, and confessed that he had met with AM/LASH in Paris in October, and that one of his agents had been meeting with the Cuban turncoat at the very moment Kennedy was shot. He did not, however, tell Elder everything. He omitted any mention of an assassination plot. He also ordered his agent to omit any mention of the poison pen from his official report.

Elder was struck by Fitzgerald's discomfort. "Des was normally imperturbable, but he was very disturbed about his involvement," recalled Elder. The director's assistant couldn't understand why Fitzgerald seemed so distraught, wringing his hands and shaking his head. "I thought Des was overreacting," says Elder.



KATZENBACH: Fearing a cold-war crisis, the top deputy at Justice wanted America to believe that Oswald shot JFK

Hand-wringing was not FitzGerald's style. Within the Agency, FitzGerald, of St. Mark's and Harvard, was known for his aristocratic mien. "Des was rather a snob," said Helms. He was also a stoic. His letters home during World War II make his forced marches through the Burma jungle seem like a nature walk. One of his daughters once found him with his finger wedged in the garage door. Though sweating profusely, he showed no emotion.

FitzGerald was under terrible stress that autumn. Independently wealthy, he paid little attention to money, letting his paychecks pile up on the front-hall table. But that October, one of FitzGerald's old college clubmates, to whom he had entrusted much of his family fortune, absconded with the money. Before FitzGerald left for Paris to meet AM/LASH, he had put his Georgetown house on the market and sold his Jaguar.

The stress increased that November weekend. The CIA's counterintelligence experts were working around the clock to see who else, besides Oswald, had met recently with the KGB's Kostikov in Mexico City. One name on the list was Rolando Cubela. The counterintelligence men ran a routine "trace" to see if anyone in the Agency knew Cubela.

FitzGerald kept silent. Technically, he did not have to answer. His supersecret Special Affairs Staff was exempt from queries from the Counterintelligence staff. But FitzGerald was influenced by another factor. Counterintelligence, or "CI," was the domain of the legendary James Jesus Angleton, the sepulchral mole-hunter who was becoming increasingly drunken and paranoid. Angleton could spend months, even years, puzzling over a case, peering at mirrors within mirrors as he downed martinis over four-hour lunches at Chez Niçoise in Georgetown. His relentless hunt for a Soviet mole within the CIA threatened to paralyze the Agency. Angleton saw conspiracies everywhere:

he considered the Sino-Soviet split to be a Russian trick. What would he have made of Cubela? FitzGerald, an action man who regarded counterintelligence as a nuisance, was not going to find out. "There is not a goddam thing Angleton or his henchmen could have come up with," insists FitzGerald's assistant, Sam Halpern. "Des thought, what the hell is Jim going to tell me?" A decade later, when the CIA official who was assigned to oversee the Agency's investigation of the assassination learned about Cubela, he stated: "That would have become an absolutely vital factor in analyzing the events surrounding the Kennedy assassination."

FitzGerald may have been cavalier about keeping Angleton informed. But, inwardly, he was not cocky about his own role in the affair. At lunch on Sunday, FitzGerald was at home watching television when Jack Ruby shot Oswald in the Dallas police station. His wife, Barbara, was shocked to see her husband burst into tears. She had never seen him cry before. "Now," said FitzGerald, "we'll never know."

Nick Katzenbach was watching television with a friend when Ruby shot Oswald. "Oh, shit," he said. He picked up the phone and called the FBI. "How the hell could this have happened?" he demanded. He knew that the shooting would inflame the conspiracy theorists, who would immediately conclude that Oswald had been silenced. Katzenbach knew that a century after Lincoln was shot, books were still being written spinning conspiracy theories. Katzenbach was beside himself with anger and frustration. Historically, assassinations of heads of state were carried out by their successors. The Kennedy assassination had happened in Texas. Would people now think that Johnson had killed Kennedy?

What was needed, he thought, was a way to calm public reaction, to reassure Americans that they were not witnesses to

some latter-day Shakespearean drama. In conversations with White House aide Bill Moyers and Gene Rostow, the dean of Yale Law School, Katzenbach began working through an idea—a commission of worthies, above politics, who could put these crazy conspiracy theories to rest.

Rostow worried about Katzenbach. He told Moyers that Katzenbach "has so much of a burden on him . . . he just sounds so groggy." But Katzenbach had a clear plan, and he planted it that Sunday afternoon. Katzenbach discussed his plan with Homer Thornberry, a Texas congressman who was close to LBJ. Thornberry dutifully reported to the White House that Katzenbach "is very concerned that everyone know that Oswald was guilty of

shooting "by the end of the week, if that's at all possible."

Hoover regarded Oswald as a communist. The label suited his purpose: for decades, Hoover had been warning that the Red Menace had swept across America's shores. By the 1960s, Hoover's men had so infiltrated the American Communist Party that agents joked that most card-carrying members were on the FBI payroll. But the mob was different—perhaps because it was more dangerous.

Hoover had plenty of reason to wonder about mob involvement in the assassination. He knew about the plots to kill Castro and about the woman shared by Chicago's gangland boss, Sam Momo Giancana, and President Kennedy. He knew, from FBI

... Johnson, himself a conspiratorial type, always

suspected that the Cubans were behind the assassination ...

the president's assassination. Oswald is dead and the newspapers are wanting to know if he really was the one who killed the president." Katzenbach, he went on, recommended that consideration be given to appointing a nonpartisan presidential commission composed of justices and statesmen. The congressman noted that television commentator Howard K. Smith "and others are now saying we don't know if Oswald really committed the crime and perhaps we will never know."

That Sunday night, FBI Special Agent Hosty was summoned to the office of his superior, Gordon Shanklin. Hosty, who had slept only four hours in the last 48, knew his career as an agent in Mr. Hoover's army was in serious jeopardy. He found Shanklin once again holding that note from Oswald warning Hosty to stop bothering his wife. Oswald is dead now, said Shanklin. There can be no trial. "Here"—he held up the note. "Get rid of this."

Hosty later recalled a line from "The Caine Mutiny," about how the navy is a master plan conceived by geniuses to be executed by idiots. Hoover always wanted to put the blame as far away as possible from headquarters. "Everybody was tidying up loose ends," said Hosty. Years later he would have a flicker of recognition when he heard that the CIA agent was ordered not to mention the poison pen in his report about AM/LASH. Hosty flushed Oswald's note down the toilet.

THE MURDER OF LEE HARVEY OSWALD
should have made Hoover stop
and question whether Oswald
acted alone when he shot JFK.
Indeed, the FBI had been anonymously
warned the night before that Oswald
would soon be shot. Jack Ruby was

a sleazy nightclub owner. Was he also a hit man for the mob?

Hoover does not appear to have tried very hard to find out. The Oswald shooting only seems to have stimulated the FBI director's desire to wrap up the investigation as quickly as possible. Late Sunday afternoon Hoover called President Johnson. "The thing I am most concerned about, and so is Mr. Katzenbach, is having something issued so we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin." He would tell his assistant director the next morning that he wanted to make public the FBI's own report on the

wiretaps of mob headquarters, that mobsters had angrily wanted Kennedy dead. Yet Hoover had a strange ambivalence about the Mafia. He had not taken it as a serious crime threat until a state-police raid on the Mafia's national commission meeting at Apalachin, N.Y., in 1957. Hoover had later set up a Top Hoodlum Program, but he had to be pushed by Bobby Kennedy to really go after the mob. Hoover's aides always said that Hoover was wary of chasing the mob because he feared that his agents would be corrupted. Hoover's biographers have suggested that Hoover himself was corrupted by the Mafia. A favorite theory is that the mob knew Hoover was homosexual and threatened blackmail. There are stories of Hoover befriending Frank Costello, the original Godfather, at the racetrack. One old mobster, Carmine (The Doctor) Lombardozzi, even boasted in 1990 that "Hoover was in our pocket. He was no one we needed to fear." Still, there is no conclusive evidence to prove that Hoover was somehow beholden to the bosses.

Hoover may have turned a deaf ear to the mob, but at least some of his agents were listening—literally—to what the top gangsters were saying. William Roemer, the FBI's senior agent assigned to the mob in Chicago, did not receive any orders from Washington, but he wasn't expecting any. When Roemer had been given the job of bugging Mafia headquarters in Chicago in 1960, he had been told by Hoover that if he was caught, he would be fired. The FBI would treat him as a renegade.

Roemer wondered from the moment he heard about Kennedy's assassination—from the *maitre d'* in a mobbed-up club where he was eating lunch with an informant—whether the Mafia had hit Kennedy. He knew the mob felt betrayed by the president. Over the FBI's secret bugs, he had heard Mafia bosses brag about the protection bought by their payoffs to the Kennedys in 1959. When Bobby Kennedy began cracking down on mob activities as attorney general, Sam Giancana, the Chicago don, declared, "If this was Nazi Germany, I'd be the biggest f---in' Jew around."

The weekend after the assassination, Roemer spent hours in the FBI's "tech room," listening to the two microphones planted by the FBI—one, called "Mo" after Giancana's middle name, in the mobster's favorite drinking place, the Armory Lounge; the other, called "Little Al" after Al Capone, in mob headquarters in a custom tailoring shop at 620 N. Michigan. The mobsters were "gleeful," Roemer recalls. A henchman of Philadelphia boss Angelo Bruno remarked, "It's too bad his brother Bobby wasn't in that car, too." But Roemer heard nothing to indicate that the



HOOVER: The FBI director blamed his agents for failing to stop Oswald, then covered it up

mob had planned the assassination. One of Giancana's thugs, Chuckie English, said Kennedy was killed by "a Marxist." Giancana's admiring response was, "He was a marksman who knew how to shoot." But the top boss never said anything that hinted at a conspiracy.

Oswald's death renewed Roemer's suspicions. He went out to see Lenny Patrick, the Jewish capo of Chicago, to see what he knew about Ruby, who was from Chicago. Patrick "was a very personable guy, except that he had killed six people," said Roemer. Patrick was not a mob informant, but "I had done a big favor for Lenny," said Roemer, "so I could talk to him." Patrick told Roemer that he knew Ruby, but that he wasn't really "our guy"; he was not a "made" member of the mob. Patrick said Ruby was unstable, unreliable. "It was convincing to me," said Roemer, who remains very doubtful that the Mafia arranged to kill either Oswald or Kennedy.

Hoover hated the idea, pushed by Nick Katzenbach and others, of appointing an independent commission to investigate the assassination. He saw it as a liberal plot to undermine his own authority. He had, at the outset at least, an ally in Lyndon Johnson, who believed that if there was to be any commission at all, it should be a Texas-based, Texan-run state board of inquiry. On Monday morning, President Johnson observed that "some lawyer in the Justice Department"—meaning Katzenbach—"is lobbying with the [Washington] Post" to editorialize in favor of a presidential commission. "It'll be a regular circus," agreed Hoover. Johnson suggested that Hoover try to get The Washington Post editorial killed. "I don't have much influence with the Post because I frankly don't read it," said Hoover. "I view it like the Daily Worker."

Johnson was lobbied from the other side by columnist Joe Alsop, whose Georgetown dining room was the salon of establishment Washington. Like Walter Lippmann, Alsop saw himself as a kind of pundit grandee, entitled to advise the public figures he wrote about. Over the phone that Monday morning, Alsop flattered Johnson ("You've already made a marvelous start, you haven't put a damned foot one quarter of an inch wrong"), and dropped the name of Dean Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, who stood as a personal icon to LBJ. A commission of men like Acheson would reassure the public, said Alsop. Then he played his best card: LBJ wouldn't want the final responsibility to rest with the attorney general—Robert F. Kennedy—would he? Johnson grumbled about states' rights and "carpetbaggers."

But the establishment was closing ranks. That afternoon, Katzenbach wrote a memo laying out the reason for a presidential commission: "The public trust must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large. . . . Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off. . . ." Today Katzenbach insists that he was just trying to make sure that all the facts came out. But in trying to cut off speculation, he appeared to foreordain the final judgment.

By the end of the week, Lyndon Johnson had made the idea of a presidential commission his very own. The way in which he commanded a reluctant Chief Justice Earl Warren to head a presidential commission reveals both the fears of the establishment and LBJ's avalanche style:

"Now, listen," the president braced Warren, as LBJ recounted the story that night, "you'd get into a World War I uniform and you'd go fight if you thought it could save one American life. Now



ANGLETON: The CIA's legendary mole-hunter obsessed about a communist plot to kill JFK

these wild people [are] charging that Khrushchev killed Kennedy and Castro killed Kennedy and everybody else killed Kennedy. Now we have had 60 FBI agents working for seven days and they've got the story and they've got the fingerprints and they've got everything else, but the American people and the world have got to know who killed Kennedy and somebody has got to evaluate that report and if they don't . . . Why, [if] Khrushchev moved on us he could kill 39 million people in an hour . . ."

Hoover remained sullen about the Warren Commission. But, seven days after Kennedy's death, the FBI director had what he wanted from the president: fealty. "You're more than the head of the Federal Bureau," Johnson gushed to Hoover, after the Director offered to bulletproof his limousine for protection. "As far as I am concerned, you're my brother . . . I've got more confidence in your judgment than anyone in town . . ."

IN THE END, THE FBI USED 80 AGENTS to conduct 25,000 interviews and file 2,300 reports that filled 25,400 pages. Hoover, with his love of statistics, cited these to show how hard the FBI worked to solve the Kennedy assassination. The Warren Commission's report, based largely on the FBI's investigation, filled 27 volumes, including testimony. Released September 1964, it sought to prove that Oswald had acted alone. But the public was not persuaded for long. In response to skeptical opinion polls and a virtual growth industry in conspiracy theories, Congress

theless, they persisted in certain important precincts. Hoover himself seems to have begun to wonder whether there might have been a hidden hand behind Oswald. In December he resisted pressure from Nick Katzenbach to put out a press release declaring Oswald to be the lone gunman. Hoover apparently suspected that Oswald may have been part of a communist plot. He also suspected Katzenbach of plotting against the FBI. Ever protective of his reputation, he was not about to stick his neck out with a press release—only to have it chopped off by some later revelation. Hoover was equally suspicious that Earl Warren was out to get him, and armed himself accordingly: every time the Warren Commission picked a new staffer, Hoover would inquire, "What have we got on him?" Quietly, Hoover censured 17 FBI agents for "investigative deficiencies" in the Oswald case. (He tried to force Hosty to quit; Hosty refused and, protected by civil-service rules, retired in 1979 at 55.) But Hoover never informed the Warren Commission, allowing conspiracy theorists to cry cover-up. (The Bureau failed to reveal that Hosty's name and phone number had shown up in Oswald's address book. That must mean, the fantasists reckon, that Oswald was a secret informant of the FBI.)

The CIA's wary relationship with the Warren Commission only added to the suspicions of the skeptics. The Agency never told the commission about AM/LASH—or any of its other assassination plots. "Why would we have?" demands Richard Helms. "I sent the Warren Commission every goddam thing they asked for. But we weren't going to suggest that all of Washington know about it." He points out that Allen Dulles, a former director of the CIA, was on the Warren Commission. But Dulles knew nothing about AM/LASH, who was recruited to kill Castro after Dulles retired.

decided in 1976 to take a fresh look at the Kennedy assassination. The report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations cast doubt on the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald was the lone gunman, although it failed to answer the mystery of who else might have plotted to kill the president. At the same time, the committee found the FBI's investigation of President Kennedy's death to be "seriously flawed" because it failed to thoroughly examine the possibility of a conspiracy.

Interestingly, even within the Washington establishment, there were serious doubts that Oswald had, in fact, acted alone. These doubts could not be expressed too openly, or the whole carefully contrived effort to reassure would come tumbling down. None-

Within the CIA, James Angleton spent years obsessing about a communist plot to kill Kennedy. He believed that Yuri Nosenko, a KGB official who had conveniently defected right after the assassination, claiming that the KGB had not recruited Oswald, was a double agent planted to throw the United States off the trail. Angleton speculated that the Cubans murdered Kennedy, perhaps at the behest of the Kremlin. But he had no real proof.

Lyndon Johnson, who was conspiratorial himself, always suspected that the Cubans were behind the assassination. Indeed, he feared that the Cubans might try to kill him. Just in case, Johnson took steps to warm relations with Castro, easing

States were upset with Kennedy. In the summer and fall of 1963, the U.S. government had begun to crack down on freelance extremist groups like Alpha 66 that wanted to overthrow Castro (the Agency worried that these freelancers would get in the way of their own plots). It is possible that some of these zealots plotted, perhaps with disaffected CIA agents, to avenge the deaths of their brothers in the Bay of Pigs. The CIA did not make much of an effort to find out. "I was just told to watch the island," says Ted Shackley, FitzGerald's top man in the CIA's Miami station (code-named JM/WAVE) in 1963. "The FBI was handling the investigation on the mainland." FitzGerald's assistant, Halpern, says, "It was a turf battle, and that always takes

... Kennedy was probably killed by a lone nut who in turn

was killed by a lone nut—but conspiracy theories die hard ...

travel restriction to Cuba only three weeks after the assassination. That winter, he called off the CIA's attempts to destabilize the Castro regime with sabotage. At the time, however, he was unaware that the CIA had also been trying to kill Castro. When he first found out from some newspaper articles in 1967, Johnson ordered Richard Helms, who had become CIA director, to conduct an internal investigation of all the Agency's assassination plots. It turned out that the irrepressible Des Fitzgerald had tried to kill Castro even after Kennedy's assassination. Fitzgerald told his staff in the spring of 1964 that the White House had called off "boom and bang"—sabotage operations—against Cuba. Nothing had been said about killing Castro, however. So that June, the CIA had delivered a cache of weapons to Cubela in another fruitless attempt to knock off the Cuban leader.

The CIA's internal investigation into assassinations was completed in May 1967. Two months later, Fitzgerald, who was only 57 at the time, died of a heart attack on the tennis court of his country estate. Johnson never got over his amazement at the CIA. In 1971, he exclaimed, "We had been operating a damned Murder Inc. in the Caribbean!"

There is no question that the government of the United States did a less than thorough job of investigating the death of President Kennedy. Still, the question remains: So what? Is there any solid evidence of a conspiracy?

It is extremely unlikely that Kennedy was the victim of a state-sponsored assassination. Khrushchev was trying to make peace with Kennedy in 1963, not kill him. The KGB regarded Oswald as a neurotic nuisance, and was happy to see him go when he redefected to the United States from Russia in 1962. Castro testified before the House assassinations committee in 1978 that it would have been "tremendous insanity" for him to order Kennedy's assassination. As Helms remarked, "We would have bombed Cuba back into the Middle Ages." It is possible, however, that Oswald read about Castro's threat in September 1963 that if "U.S. leaders" persisted in plotting against Castro, "they themselves [would] not be safe." An article with Castro's statement was prominently displayed in the New Orleans Times-Picayune on a day when Oswald was in the city. In his deluded state, he might have thought that killing Kennedy was one way to win Castro's appreciation.

Slightly more plausible conspiracy theories involve renegades and rogue agents. Many anti-Castro Cubans in the United

precedence, especially with the FBI." Yet congressional investigators later found that the FBI investigation of right-wing Cuban groups had been at best cursory.

It is impossible to prove a negative—that someone did not plot to kill Kennedy. But there is no solid evidence leading to the Agency or the Cubans. There are, however, more intriguing hints of mob involvement.

In 1979 the House assassinations committee gave the Mafia theory a big boost with its conclusion that Kennedy's death was probably the result of a conspiracy. Part of the committee's finding was based on forensic evidence that has now been challenged—a tape of the shooting that day in Dealey Plaza that seemed to suggest four shots, not just Oswald's three. But Robert Blakey, the chief counsel of the committee who is now a Notre Dame law professor, continues to insist that "leaders of organized crime were behind the president's murder." The motive was to get Bobby Kennedy off the mob's back. Ruby, he believes, was recruited by the mob to silence Oswald.

The FBI's investigation of an organized-crime connection was "severely limited," according to the House assassinations committee report. "I know they sure didn't come to me," says Courtney Evans, who was the head of the special-investigations unit set up by Hoover to watch over the Mafia. The FBI's Roemer insists that if the mob planned to kill Kennedy, he would have heard about it as he listened to Giancana and other members of the mob's national "commission" scheme and brag. But it is perhaps significant that the FBI had almost no "electronic coverage"—bugs or taps—on the top mob bosses most often suspected of murdering Kennedy: Carlos Marcello of New Orleans and Santos Trafficante of Tampa, Fla.

Trafficante had been the boss of mob gambling operations in Havana before the revolution. Jailed by Castro in 1959, he had been bailed out by—interesting coincidence—Rolando Cubela, the Cuban military official who later became the CIA's AM/LASH. In the summer of 1963, Trafficante expressed his contempt for the Kennedys, and said that the president was going to be "hit," according to José Aleman, a prominent Cuban exile. Before the House assassinations committee, however, Aleman offered a more innocent explanation (he was going to be "hit [with] a lot of votes for the Republican Party")—possibly because he feared Trafficante, who was listening in the next room. To thicken the plot, there are reports that Ruby once visited Trafficante in jail.

Marcello had a particular loathing for Bobby Kennedy, who, he claimed, had "kidnapped" him in 1961. (Deported to Guatemala, Marcello sneaked back to New Orleans and was on trial for illegal entry the day Kennedy was shot.) An oil speculator named Ed Becker claims that Marcello planned to have President Kennedy murdered because "a dog will keep biting you if you only cut off its tail."

Marcello and Trafficante both make intriguing villains. But, in addition to the lack of any hard evidence, there are two big problems with fingering them as the culprits. One is their own prudence. The two men lasted as dons for decades in part by being cagey, not by trying to kill the president of the United States.

The other drawback to the mob theory—indeed, to any conspiracy theory—is Oswald himself. It is hard to think of a more unreliable, unlikely professional hit man than a paranoid loser like Oswald (page 71). All the evidence indicates that Oswald was a true loner. If he was working for the mob, why did he take a shot at a right-wing nut, Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker, six months before he killed Kennedy? His job at the book depository was very convenient. But he got it before the motorcade route was selected. There is no trail of phone calls between Oswald and the mob in the days before the shooting. There is no evidence of contacts at all.

In the end, the Warren Commission was probably right: Ken-

Jack Ruby

'I Wanted to Be a Hero'

BY MELINDA BECK AND ANNE UNDERWOOD

WHY DID JACK RUBY shoot Lee Harvey Oswald? One theory is that the pugnacious Dallas strip-joint owner was simply overcome by emotion and trying to play hero. Other theories stipulate that he was hired—by the mob, the CIA or other dark forces—to silence Kennedy's assassin so that Oswald couldn't implicate others in a plot. Thirty years later, it is still hard to persuade conspiracists of the simpler explanation, because government investigators left so many critical questions about Ruby unexplored. When one of J. Edgar Hoover's top deputies wrote a memo warning that "a matter of this magnitude cannot be fully investigated in a week's time," the FBI director scrawled a note at the bottom saying: "It seems to me we have the basic facts now." The date was Nov. 26, 1963.

There was plenty in Ruby's background to suggest that he was just a luckless lout trying to avenge Kennedy's death. The son of a violent, alcoholic father, Ruby was nicknamed "Sparky" as a hotheaded youth in Chicago, where he ran with a gang that delivered envelopes for Al Capone. He worked, at turns, scalping tickets, selling tip sheets and doing union organizing. Even when he owned a series of nightclubs in Dallas, he hustled everything from sewing-machine attachments to arthritis remedies to raise cash on the side. He also frequently



LITTLE BIG MAN: Roaming the police station, he was hardly acting like a hit man in a plot

carried a gun and had a habit of punching out patrons who wouldn't pay or who bothered women at his clubs. And he loved to play the big shot, boasting of his friends in the mob, cultivating buddies among the Dallas police and pestering reporters for publicity. Whenever anything exciting happened in Dallas, Jack Ruby turned up.

Still, there were many signs that Ruby wasn't just a harmless scoundrel, and the investigation into his background

was remarkably—almost willfully—shallow. FBI agents interviewed hundreds of his acquaintances, but they barely followed up on obvious leads about his underworld friends and his trips to Cuba. Two attorneys assigned to investigate Ruby for the Warren Commission, Leon Hubert and Burt Griffin, wanted to explore rumors that he was a payoff man between the local mob and the Dallas cops. They also were curious about his cash-only style of operations, his Cuban connections and his ambiguous sex life. They sent repeated requests to the CIA for any material it had on Ruby. But the Agency ignored them until 11 days before the Warren report was issued in September 1964. Then it replied that a search of its files "has provided no information on Jack Ruby or his activities." Thirty years later Griffin, now a judge in Cleveland, believes more strongly than ever that Ruby wasn't part of a conspiracy. But he still wonders: "Why did it take them five to six months to say they had no information?"

One of the murkiest of the unanswered questions concerned Ruby's travel to Cuba in 1959. He clearly lied to the Warren Commission when he testified he'd gone only once, for pleasure. The House Select Committee on Assassinations later determined that he made at least three trips to Havana that summer and that he'd visited a safe-deposit box in Dallas in the meantime. That same year, while Oswald was defecting to Russia, the FBI contacted Ruby nine times, trying to recruit him as an informant. But Hoover

nedy was killed by a lone nut, who in turn was killed by another lone nut. But conspiracy theories die hard: more people believe the wackiest conspiracy theory of all—the CIA-LBJ-Pentagon plot cooked up by movie producer Oliver Stone—than they do the Warren Commission, the combined effort of senators, statesmen and Supreme Court justices.

The irony, of course, is that in their desire to reassure the public that the institutions of government would persevere, the worthies of the Washington establishment produced the opposite effect. The rush to judgment left many Americans wondering if their government was telling the truth. It is not hard to see why distrust in government increased years later when people

learned that the CIA had been covering up its own plots to kill foreign leaders. It is an absurd leap to think the CIA would kill Kennedy; old Agency hands like Richard Helms have reason to feel, as he puts it, “raped” by the movie “JFK.” But the CIA and the FBI have themselves to blame for not being more forthcoming to the Warren Commission, leaving lingering doubts that conspiracy theorists could seize on. In the end, the story of the American government and the assassination of John F. Kennedy is a tale of human error and parochialism, not of conspiracy. More likely than not, the men of the establishment were right about Oswald. But because of their mistakes, the public will never believe what really happened. ■

Jack Ruby

ver withheld that information from the Warren Commission. And the CIA failed to disclose a report that Ruby may have visited Santos Trafficante, later the mob boss of Florida, while he was jailed in Cuba at the time. There were tantalizing unconfirmed reports that Ruby was selling guns or jeeps to Cuba, or smuggling prisoners or gambling assets out. But the most plausible explanation is that Ruby was trying to horn in on more harebrained moneymaking schemes. He told the FBI in December 1963 that he had had in mind “making a buck” by possibly acquiring some jeeps but that nothing had come of it.

Ruby did make a flurry of calls to his underworld contacts in the months before the Kennedy assassination. But the calls were probably just what he said they were: he wanted help in persuading the union representing his strippers to crack down on rival clubs using amateur talent. Journalist Seth Kantor, who wrote two books on Ruby, speculated that he did borrow money from the mob and that the mob later called in the debt when it wanted someone to silence Oswald. But in many painstaking reconstructions of Ruby's actions the weekend of the assassination, there is no hard evidence of such a contact.

What Ruby did do that weekend was make a conspicuous pest of himself—he was hardly acting like a hired hit man in a dark plot. On the contrary, in a breach of security that today would be unthinkable, he roamed the halls of the Dallas police station, handing out free passes to his clubs. During Oswald's brief press conference that Friday night, Ruby even stood on a table and corrected District Attorney Henry Wade when he said Oswald belonged to the Free Cuba Commit-

tee—“No, it's Fair Play for Cuba,” Ruby called out, later explaining that he'd heard that on the radio. Ruby passed within three feet of Oswald in the corridor that night. If



SHOOTING OSWALD: If Ruby planned it in advance, why did he leave his dog in the car?

he had been hired to silence him, why didn't he shoot him then, rather than give Oswald two more days to tell his story?

Later that night Ruby took sandwiches to an all-night radio station, where he bragged about how he'd seen Oswald up close. He boasted of it again to night-shift printers at the Dallas Times Herald, where he was inspecting the ads for his clubs (he closed them out of respect for the dead president.) He was also strangely obsessed with an anti-Kennedy ad signed with a Jewish

name that appeared in The Dallas Morning News that day, fearing that Jews like him might be blamed for the assassination. That Sunday morning, Ruby left his beloved dog, Sheba, in his car when he sauntered into the police station and shot Oswald in the gut. Friends said he'd never have done that if he'd planned the shooting in advance and known he'd be taken into custody.

James Leavelle, the homicide detective who transferred Ruby to the county jail the next day, told NEWSWEEK recently that he asked Ruby why he did it and his answer was simple: “I wanted to be a hero. It looks like I fouled things up.” That may have been Ruby's most honest explanation. Afterward, it was difficult to tell just what his motivation was, given the circus trial and the mental breakdown that followed. Flamboyant attorney Melvin Belli presented a bizarre defense that Ruby had psychomotor epilepsy and had shot Oswald during a blackout. The jury took less than three hours to convict him of premeditated murder and sentenced him to die in the electric chair. That was later overturned, and a new trial date was set.

But by then, Ruby had become delusional. When the Warren Commission interviewed him in 1964 he begged to be taken to Washington so he could prove he

wasn't part of a conspiracy, and he was terrified that the John Birch Society was trying to kill him. Later he was convinced that Jews all over America were being slaughtered because of his actions—he could hear their screams, he said, in the basement of the Dallas county jail. One psychiatrist concluded that Ruby was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, which had probably begun years earlier. He died of cancer in custody in January 1967, still haunted by his private demons. ■

True Disbelievers

BY JOLIE SOLOMON

IF YOU'VE BEEN AROUND THE DEL REY Indoor Shooting Range in Del Rey Beach, Fla., lately, you may have heard a sound with a unique historic ring. It's the sharp report of Jack Ruby's gun being fired, but this time the finger on the trigger belongs to Anthony V. Pugliese III, a real-estate developer and collector who bought the gun at auction in 1991 for \$220,000.

Pugliese has been shooting 5,000 bullets through the Colt Cobra .38 and into a barrel of water, to prevent disfiguration. He sets each bullet in a museum-quality frame (with certificate of authenticity) and sells them for \$1,495. Last year he acquired a new treasure: the bloody toe tag that marked Lee Harvey Oswald's corpse, rescued for posterity by a farsighted paramedic. No plans yet for commercial development. But Pugliese would like you to know about his plans for the “Seance of the Century.” Guess who's invited?

This may sound like the good old American tradition of twisting profit from any historic moment, no matter how tragic or perverse. And it is. The cottage industry that sprang up within a day of Kennedy's assassination (when Time-Life bought Mr. Zapruder's 8-mm film for \$150,000) now encompasses more than 2,000 book titles, a half-dozen newsletters (The Grassy Knoll Gazette), several computer networks, Oliver Stone's “JFK” and this issue of NEWSWEEK.

But the consumers in question aren't exactly Trekkies or Elvis-sighters. Despite Pugliese, this is more cottage than industry, a community of true disbelievers, hungry for every morsel that might give further clues about who shot JFK and help them understand what it all means. “If you lop off the nut fringe, if you lop off the merchandisers,” says David Wrone, who teaches a course on the assassination at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, you have the people “who believe that our public system of government is endangered, and that John Kennedy's death is a symbol or metaphor for this great loss . . . of mastery of public government.” And if the six-month waiting lists for his course are any guide, their numbers are only growing.

Congregation or market, it got a huge boost from the Stone film, which has not only made more than any other assassination product ever (\$200 million, not including video sales) but

galvanized the faithful and inspired new recruits. Andrew Winiarczyk, who owns the Last Hurrah Bookstore in Williamsport, Pa., saw his Kennedy assassination book mailing list leap to 1,400 from 400; Barnes & Noble brought out a new edition of the Warren Commission summary report (out of print since the 1970s), and the Assassination Symposium on John F. Kennedy in Dallas expects 400 people at its third annual meeting this month.

Clearly, the heart of this business is books. That's been true ever since 1966, when Mark Lane's “Rush to Judgment” and Edward Jay Epstein's “Inquest” came out. They were the first blockbusters in a long line of what Woody Allen once called the “nonfiction version(s) of the Warren Report.” The vast supply of

mostly out-of-print titles and the life-long students who read, write and fight over them have created an unusual brand of mail-order business. “This isn't Lands' End,” says Winiarczyk, who talks by phone with readers worldwide and is less salesman than “intellectual psychiatrist.” He probes for the conspiratorial tastes of each caller, then recommends the relevant tract or offers a gentle reality check to someone prematurely convinced that he's discovered the missing link.

Although the top five or so assassination authors have made money, most persist in the face of penury—or other sacrifices. Take David Lifton, author of “Best Evidence,” which argues that Kennedy's wounds were altered to destroy evidence. “I never got married,” says Lifton, 53, only partly in jest, because “there always came a point where the woman realized I was more interested in the president's body than in her body.”

The agony and the ecstasy of assassination fascination is that the mystery is unlikely to yield an answer. At the same time, the dissidents still hope to change the official story. Those who

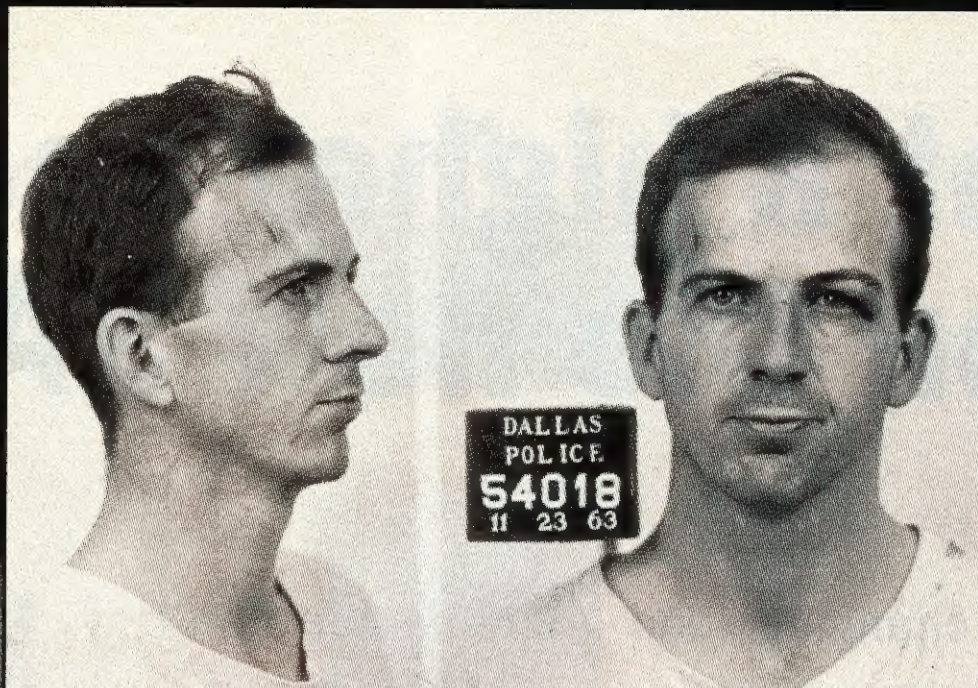
obsess, for example, about the Lincoln assassination (we still don't know exactly who, if anyone, was behind Booth) are resigned to feeling that history has been written, says Winiarczyk. “But the idea persists in our hearts that this has not yet passed into the mists of history. We can still do something about it.”

That's certainly true for Mary Ferrell. An assistant to Jim Garrison, the hero of Stone's film, Ferrell has spent a lifetime searching and says she's “no closer to any conclusion today than I was 30 years ago.” But she doesn't regret a minute of it, not even her refusal to grant the deathbed wish of her mother, who implored her, “Mary Elizabeth, a Southern lady simply does not chase assassins. I want you to stay away from that Jim Garrison.” Ferrell couldn't even pretend to promise.

With SUSAN MILLER, ANNE UNDERWOOD and CAREY MONSERRATE



PRECIOUS REMAINS: Ruby's hat and gun could fetch more than \$2 million today



Who hired Oswald (above)? Mobster John Roselli (top, left) hinted that 'associates' had ordered a hit. Mob don Santos Trafficante (left) predicted JFK wouldn't run again. Castro (right) had his motives. The far right advertised its dissatisfaction (bottom, left).



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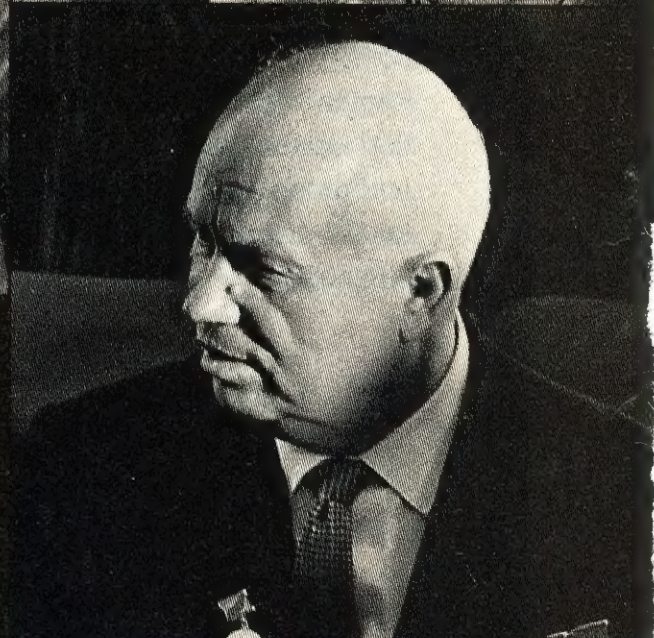
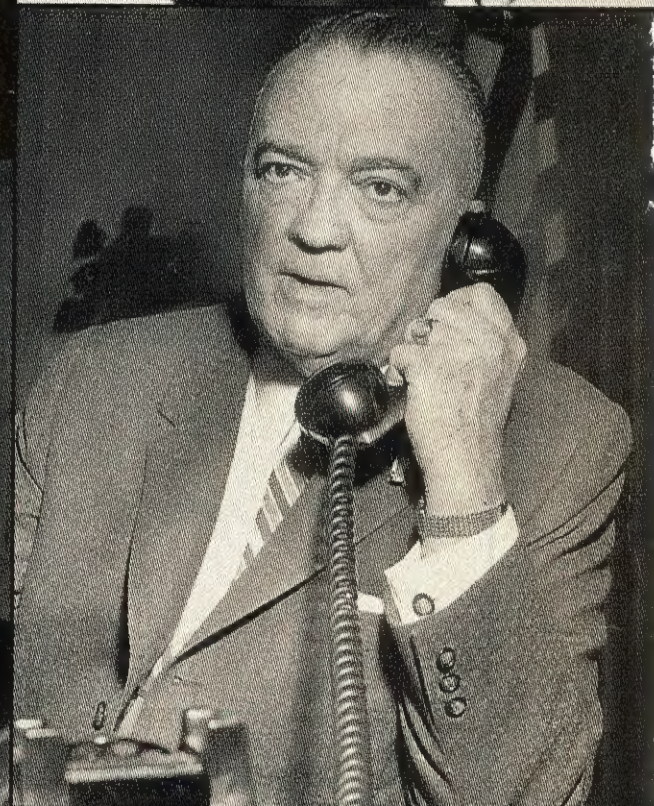
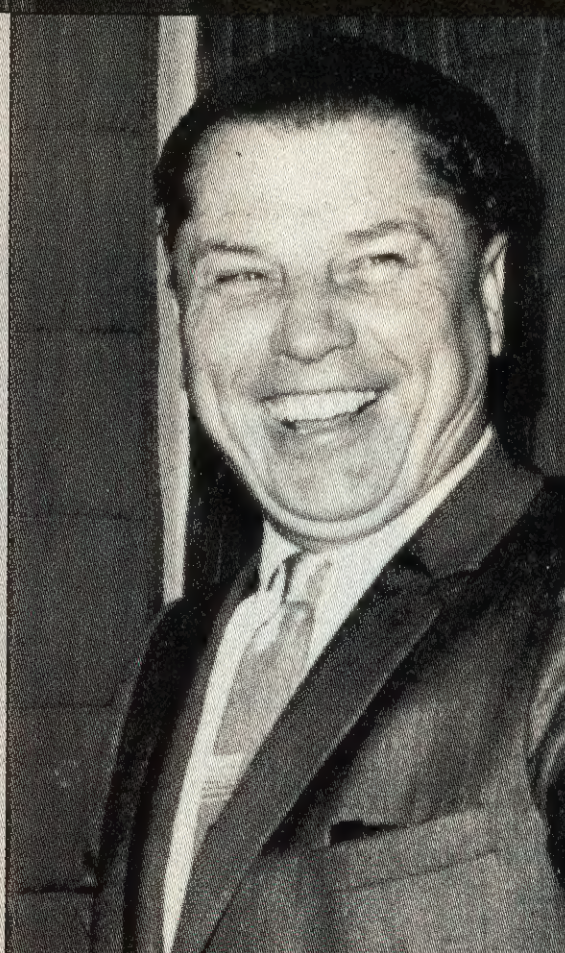
WANTED
FOR
TREASON

THIS MAN is wanted for treasonous activities against the United States:

1. Betraying the Constitution (which he swore to uphold): He is turning the sovereignty of the U.S. over to the communist controlled United Nations. He is betraying our friends (Cuba, Katanga, Portugal) and befriending our enemies (Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland).
2. He has been WRONG on innumerable issues affecting the security of the U.S. (United Nations, Berlin wall, Missile removal, Cuba, Wheat deals, Test Ban Treaty, etc.)

3. He has been lax in enforcing Communist Registration laws.
4. He has given support and encouragement to the Communist inspired racial riots.
5. He has illegally invaded a sovereign State with federal troops.
6. He has consistently appointed Anti-Christians to Federal office: Upholds the Supreme Court in its Anti-Christian rulings. Aliens and known Communists abound in Federal offices.
7. He has been caught in fantastic LIES to the American people (including personal ones like his previous marriage and divorce).

Did Jimmy Hoffa (above), J. Edgar Hoover (right) and Nikita Khrushchev (bottom, right) know more about JFK's death than they said? Kennedy threatened Hoffa the most. His Teamsters reportedly sent flowers to Oswald's grave.



THE CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The official version of the murder—lone nut #1 shoots JFK, gets shot by lone nut #2—seems improbable. Competing theories have problems, too.

THE SCENARIO	WHAT'S THE PLOT?	WHAT'S THE HITCH?
1 The Ultimate "Black Op" (The CIA did it.)	The CIA (or a few rogue agents) feared JFK would sell out to the Reds—and dismember the agency itself. And CIA types knew how to do hits on the qt. Oswald, an ex-defector, could have been a CIA recruit. Or perhaps just a "patsy," maneuvered into place to cover for sharpshooters elsewhere in Dealey Plaza.	Oswald was no hit man, and making him a patsy would have taken great logistical legerdemain. Then how to silence the real hit persons? Hit <i>them</i> ?
2 The Ultimate Mob Hit (The Mafia did it.)	What would happen to <i>you</i> if you hired the mob to do your murders, shtupped a mob-connected gadabout—and cracked down on organized crime? Oswald was a mob guy's nephew; Ruby had scary mob acquaintances. Small-timers, both; but some don might have thought their obscurity meant deniability.	Would <i>truly</i> wiseguys take the suicidal risk of whacking a president? How did they arm-twist Ruby into hitting Oswald? How did they know <i>he</i> wouldn't talk?
3 Cuban Caper I (Anti-Castro exiles did it.)	Anti-Castro exiles felt Kennedy hung them out to dry during the abortive CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion. The supposedly pro-Castro Oswald used a New Orleans address occupied by anti-Castro activists; odd, yes? And Ruby had been in Cuba, visiting a mob chum who later became an anti-Castroite.	Would Cuban exiles have trusted the Anglo commie Oswald? Or, if he was a patsy, could they have set up this more elaborate plot unhelped and undetected?
4 Cuban Caper II (Castro did it.)	Castro was well aware of American plots to assassinate him; no less a conspiracy theorist than Lyndon Johnson suspected Castro had ordered Kennedy killed in retaliation. Oswald, a self-proclaimed Marxist and Castro supporter, had visited the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City two months before the assassination.	Castro has said ordering the hit would have been stupid. He <i>would</i> say that. But it would have been stupid—even if the too-traceable Oswald hadn't done it.
5 Mission From Moscow (The KGB did it.)	Oswald also visited the Soviet Embassy in Mexico, where he met with a KGB official known to be involved in "wet affairs"—i.e., sabotage and assassinations. After defecting to the Soviet Union in 1959, Oswald—or, more baroquely, an Oswald double—may have come back to the United States a programmed assassin.	Wet Affairs Rule One: Don't meet programmed assassins in the embassy. And why risk nuclear war to replace a young hard-liner with an old one?
6 Coup D'Etat (Lyndon Johnson, the Joint Chiefs, the intelligence community and the military industrial complex did it.)	This is less a theory than filmmaker Oliver Stone's countermyth of recent American history: the establishment bad guys wanted JFK dead so the war machine could run riot in Vietnam and weapons makers could get rich. Well? It all happened, didn't it?	With so many people ready to help—from hit squad to autopsy team to Warren Commission—why a Rube Goldberg scheme in view of a plazaful of witnesses?
7 Honey, I Shot the President I (A Secret Service Agent did it, by accident.)	Maryland ballistics expert Howard Donahue argues that JFK was accidentally shot in the head by a Secret Service agent in the follow-up car; his AR-15 supposedly went off when he picked it up in response to Oswald's shots. In the echo chamber of Dealey Plaza, the agent himself may not have known he'd fired.	None of the nine other passengers ever reported hearing a gun go off in the follow-up car. (The agent in question, understandably, wouldn't talk to Donahue.)
8 Honey, I Shot the President II (Oswald did it, but he was shooting at John Connally.)	Marina Oswald testified that she thought her husband may have been shooting at John Connally, not JFK. Why? Oswald felt Connally, former navy secretary, had brushed off his attempts to upgrade his Marine Corps discharge. And a Dallas lawyer said he overheard Oswald plotting Connally's murder with Jack Ruby.	For someone <i>not</i> shooting at the president, Oswald—or whoever—did a deadly efficient job. Supposedly he wasn't much of a marksman, but was he this bad?

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: AP, NC, BOB HENRIQUES—MAGNUM, UPI, UPI—BETTMANN, NC, ARCHIVE, WERNER WOLFF—BLACK STAR